

# GETTING UNDER WAY WITH WAR HOUSING

## National Housing Association Supervising Buildings Near Yards, Munition Works and in Washington

By Katharine Wright

AMERICA began to awaken six months ago to the fact that the lack of decent, comfortable and healthful homes for the thousands of workers who have rushed to our great war plants was seriously hampering her efforts, as was shown in an article in The Tribune last Sunday. Since that time vigorous efforts have been made to solve the problems arising by both government agencies and private corporations.

This article deals with the government efforts. The results were summed up at the twenty-sixth annual convention of the United States League of Building and Loan Associations, held at Newark last month, by Frederick L. Ackerman, architect and supervisor of designs, United States Shipping Board, speaking of "Government Aid in War Time" and of the activities of the Emergency Fleet Corporation, who said:

"To those of us who have followed this work from the day we entered the war, who have felt the urgent need for action, who have realized the full importance and the ultimate bearing of housing upon the war, it is an inspiring sight to watch the new towns taking form, for we know that it is a step toward 'more ships—still more ships.' Back of the shipyards on the Delaware I have watched the steam shovels working their way like tanks in action across the fields, and behind these I have seen the houses taking form. Armies of workers swarm upon these and before fall there will be new towns. But the work is not here confined; it reaches from coast to coast and from the Great Lakes to the Gulf. Before the end of the year there will have been completed accommodations for approximately 40,000 workers, and in these new towns there will have been made provision for a population of 125,000 to the end that ships shall be more rapidly built."

### First Appropriation

#### Only Two Months Ago

It was, however, only after nearly a year's delay from the time that this country entered the war that the government began to take action. It was January 4, 1918, when President Wilson authorized the Department of Labor to administer the whole question of housing and transporting labor, and it was February before the Bureau of Industrial Housing and Transportation was established, for the purpose of meeting the housing problem in cities having factories working on government contracts.

And it was not until about two months ago that Congress made its first appropriation of \$50,000,000 for housing construction. An extra \$10,000,000 was voted to construct government houses and hotels in Washington for accommodations for government clerks paying excessive room rents owing to congestion. Last month another \$40,000,000 was made available for the housing of war workers. Of this total \$50,000,000 went to the Department of Labor and \$50,000,000 to the Shipping Board.

All this, however, according to Lawrence Veiller, secretary of the National Housing Association, has been "only a drop in the bucket." The progress made in this country up to the opening of the war had been considerably less than in Britain, and yet the British government has already spent \$700,000,000 on war housing, as against the \$100,000,000 here, where the problem is, if anything, bigger.

### Temporary Houses

#### Prove Too Costly

As the dominant need was to speed the production of munitions and other war necessities, temporary housing in many cases was the most practical method of bettering congestion, but in communities where industries are likely to continue after the war, such as in the case of many of the shipyards—permanent buildings and cities are being constructed. Since the beginning of the American programme for the housing of war workers it has been found that the cost of temporary housing is as great as that of permanent accommodations, and the future trend of the work will, therefore, lie in the direction of permanent homes and communities.

### Housing Problems

#### After the War

"You people of the United States in giving consideration to war housing problems are overlooking two important things," declares Thomas Adams, of the British Housing Commission. "One is that you had housing problems before the war, and the other is that you will have housing problems after the war. At the beginning of the war you had some 20,000 skilled shipbuilders. By the end of the war you will have some 220,000 skilled shipbuilders. That is, you will have converted 200,000 unskilled men, or men skilled in other lines than shipbuilding, into skilled shipbuilders. What are you going to do with the men when the war is over? Scrap them?"

"Certainly not. You will go on building ships, building more of them than you ever built before, building great merchant fleets, so that in the future you will be able to carry the vast products of your agriculture and industry all over the world in bottoms owned by you and not in bottoms rented to you by other nations. You must, therefore, make in Hog Island and its environs permanent homes, not homes

built to last only two, three or five years, but as good homes as can be built anywhere. Temporary barracks for the housing of workmen at Hog Island are, of course, necessary, but they should be used only to house relays of workmen for a few weeks at a time, until permanent houses can be built for them."

"America has been slow in coming to government participation in the housing of the country's workers," declares Lawrence Veiller, secretary of the National Housing Association. "The war has driven her to it. Housing reformers throughout the country are watching with keen interest the new industrial developments which are to come from the millions now being expended by the Federal government under Mr. Edlitz, in the Department of Labor and under the Shipping Board."

### Country Certain

#### To Be Gainer

"While everybody recognizes that in granting what to-day is considered a drop in the bucket and what before the war we should have considered a vast sum, Congress has done so solely as one means of winning the war through quickening the production of ships and munitions; yet there are many persons throughout the country who believe that the government, once launched upon Federal housing enterprises, will probably continue this work in some form or another after the close of the war."

"In any event, the country is bound to be the gainer by its participation in the building of workmen's dwellings. If we do not have several Garden Village developments in this country as a result of these efforts it will indeed be surprising. Already the country has greatly benefited through the activities of Mr. Edlitz and his associates at Washington in the enunciation and formulation of the new governmental standards for permanent construction. These are bound to influence the type of house to be built by the commercial builder for many years to come."

"Mr. Edlitz has been very wise in his decision to have the government keep control of the various activities upon which government money is to be expended. While this places an additional burden and responsibility upon his shoulders, it seems to me the only safe course for the government to follow. I can see no other method by which proper maintenance of the various colonies to be established can be assured."

### The Housing of

#### Married Workers

The work which the government has done naturally falls under two heads—first, that of the bureau of the Department of Labor, and, second, that of preparing to spend the hundred million appropriations. While there are often enough rooms and sufficient housing accommodations for the single worker, the skilled married worker is more difficult to house, and so the problem of the bureau becomes the problem of

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## WORKERS' HOMES IN ALLWOOD, MODEL VILLAGE



Store with row of dwellings

housing the married man with a family. In over forty American cities new construction is the only remedy for congestion.

The bureau's first step was to investigate local conditions, to find out the actual housing shortage and the relative urgency of the local housing problem as contrasted with that of other cities. In even the most crowded city there are some vacancies, and no one agency has a complete list. It was found that this situation could be met by a canvass of every vacant house, flat and room in each city and its available suburbs.

Cards for the purpose of filing such information were prepared by the bureau. The nature, size, equipment, rent and quality of each vacant dwelling are listed. These cards are kept in a central house registration office for the use of workers in all war industries of the city, free of charge. Thus a worker in war industries has access to a complete list of vacancies and may select the dwelling that most appeals to him. His choice is, of course, governed by his wages, his marital condition and the type of house that he prefers.

### Checking the

#### Rent Profiteer

Committees on rent profiteering have been established. Each committee is composed of three—a representative of labor, of the real estate interests and of the general public. Complaints of excessive rents are heard. Both sides of the case are presented. Sometimes the landlord is vindicated. If he is guilty he is told what a fair rent would be for the property. If he refuses to come to terms the details of the case are published in the local papers without comment. A reduction is usually effected by reasoning with the landlord on patriotic grounds. Few are willing to submit to unpleasant publicity.

Transportation comes next in order as a means of solving the housing problem. Sometimes a very large number of new houses may be made available for workmen by the establishment of new stations near the factory or by an improvement in train schedules. At Asbury Park 750 houses and thousands of rooms were vacant. In order to induce workers to move from the congested Amboys, near the Gillespie plant, the government is now running special trains at 6 o'clock every morning between Asbury Park and the plant. There is a special fare of 30 cents for the round trip. Other trains of this type will be established throughout the country.

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A block of eight-room homes

The spending of the \$50,000,000 made available for the Labor Department has been put in the hands of the United States Housing Corporation. This corporation was established with a capital of \$100,000,000, with the following officers: Mr. Edlitz, director of the Bureau of Industrial Housing, president; Mr. Leland, assistant director of the bureau, vice-president; Mr. Fenner, general manager of the bureau, secretary; Mr. Box, fiscal supervisor of the bureau, treasurer. Other members of the corporation are: Mr. Alvord, chief of engineering; Mr. Shannon, manager of the real estate division; Mr. Kerr, chief counsel, and Mr. Olmsted, chief town planner.

Already land has been purchased in more than a dozen cities. Old hotels have been bought for remodeling. Contracts are under way at Bethlehem, Penn., Charleston and Portsmouth, Va.

In Washington dormitories for women workers, known as residence halls, are being constructed with cafeterias, central auditoriums and small recreation halls. Apartment houses, group dwellings, semi-detached houses and cottages, both for skilled and unskilled labor, are in process of construction.

Two great questions were before the commission when it began to plan for the spending of this fund and for the still larger funds which it is confidently expected will shortly have to be placed at its disposal. The first was as to the character of construction—whether it should be temporary or permanent. The second was whether the money should be loaned in part or in whole to local agencies, or whether the whole thing should be kept under government control.

The first question has not been brought to any general conclusion. The small amount of money available as compared to the needs and the time necessary to construct permanent buildings gives a decided tendency toward the rushing of temporary work. But the discovery that fairly per-

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Two-family house

Murphy & Dana, and W. L. Somerville, architects

after the war, but will be nil if its activities cease with those of Foch. Thomas Lawson, the English town planning expert, ardently in favor of permanent housing, lays emphasis on the advantage of community development on the Garden City principle, due to certain increase in the value of the land converted from agricultural to building uses. Figures of land values in America show that the profits of such an enterprise would be greater than in England.

According to statistics, the market value in 1908 of the land in Gary, excluding that occupied by the plants of the Steel Corporation, was estimated at \$6,414,455, and the present value at \$33,415,300. The increase in the ten-year period, therefore, amounts to \$27,000,845. The examination of the value of the services rendered by those who have come into the possession of this increment indicates that an allowance of perhaps \$200,000 should be made for necessary administrative expense; that not more than \$1,000,000 should be credited because of taxes advanced on unused lands, and that \$1,025,712.70 should be allowed as having been paid by landowners for local improvements. The total money value of the services of these beneficiaries of the increment amounts, then, to \$5,225,712.70. The amount of the increment which might conceivably have been conserved is thus found to be \$21,805,732.30.

### Difficulty of

#### Choosing a Policy

The corporation has finally decided against making loans to cities or firms for housing purposes, after having tried in vain to work out a suitable method of doing this. It proved impossible to reach any general or satisfactory agreement with those seeking the loans as to terms and the proportion of funds to be furnished by each side to the agreement. The negotiations took up considerable time and showed no sign of reaching a conclusion, and so were abandoned.

A different policy has been pursued by the Emergency Fleet Corporation, which has the administration of the second \$50,000,000 fund. Its division of housing and transportation controls the disbursement for transportation and living accommodations in and about the shipyards. Its policy is to make appropriations from its fund as loans to the subsidiary corporations, which build the properties according to their own estimates of the need of permanency. The corporations are then owners of the properties, and, of course, responsible for the investments. The Fleet Corporation, however, retains control of sales, renting and restrictions on the property for six months after the war. It also must approve the selection of architects, engineers, contractors and so forth, and determines the amount of compensation for each.

One of the questions which enters most seriously into the matter of the permanency of the construction is that of the possible increase of the land values. This, of course, will be great if the plant around which the houses are built remains in operation

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enemy is the knowledge of a ship's actual course, not her approximate direction. Then, too, the menace of smoke is always betraying a vessel. So finally it has become established that unless a vessel and her smoke can be rendered absolutely invisible no useful purpose is served in aiming to achieve invisibility.

The Realness Of Unreality

Baffle painting is the only present internationally accepted method of camouflage.

To the man who is skeptical one look through a periscope at a baffle painted ship "about eight points off her course" will quickly convince him that the realness about the system is its splendid unreality.

So the baffle scheme is based upon the principle that some protection, total invisibility being unattainable, may be afforded by painting vessels in such a deceptive way as to confuse an enemy submarine.

It is simply a project for breaking up all accented forms of a ship by masses of strongly contrasting colors, distorting her appearance so as to destroy her general symmetry and bulk. The idea is to totally mislead the submarine when once his "prey" has been sighted.

The baffle system has proved so efficient that captains of ships who have had opportunity to witness its effects are showing great interest and desire to have their vessels so treated.

Camouflage painting of ships under the advantages promised by the employment of baffle theories seemed of so great importance that the government created a department expressly for that branch of service.

All scientific experimental and research work, together with the designing and making of plans, was delegated to the Navy Department. All camouflage of ships built for the United States Shipping Board Emergency Fleet Corporation is now prescribed and supervised by the Navy Department.

The execution of work is conferred upon the United States Shipping Board Emergency Fleet Corporation and assigned to the division of steel ship construction. Herein was organized in February of this year the department of camouflage, under the management of Henry C. Grover, of Boston.

Mr. Grover, with headquarters in Philadelphia, is in direct charge of the

There is No Invisibility

And that consideration involves the efficiency of the submarine hydrophone. This highly developed instrument is able not only to determine the probable class of a ship, whether she is alone or the number of vessels if in convoy, but can, by a series of listening observations, obtain approximately a ship's direction of course. But the instrument of prime importance to the

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## \$100,000,000 Now Available by Department of Labor and the Shipping Board—Difficult to Settle on Policy

ment auspices, as given by Mr. Adams, for one of the large shipbuilding plants, where 10,000 well paid workmen will be required:

"Provision for a population of 50,000 will have to be made. The proper thing here would be to create a new town."

"An area of from twelve to fifteen square miles of agricultural land should be acquired within three or five miles of the plant, near to a main line of railway. Rapid transit should be provided to enable the workers to get to the plant within fifteen or twenty minutes the town should be planned and water supply and other works installed, roads and sewers built, theatres, stores and public buildings erected. Auxiliary industries should be provided for and encouraged. Private enterprise should be invited to assist in the structural development. The capital employed need not be greater than what will be needed for any other kind of scheme, as the saving in cost of land will be sufficient to pay the cost of providing public utilities and social services. After paying, say, 5 or 6 per cent on the capital employed all profits should revert to the community for the benefit of the town. A large portion of the land should be permanently set aside as an agricultural estate."

There Are 250 Ways of Doing It.

Many and brave have been the attempts to house the workman. Formerly a manufacturer wishing to house his employees hired a local builder and went ahead. "Mill villages," depressing rows of detached houses, were the result.

Some 250 housing developments, good, bad and indifferent, including employers' enterprises and model housing schemes, exist to-day. American architects are just now beginning to realize the advantages of the group house which has been used with success in England for many generations. Those who look favorably upon it say that it is easy to heat, that it costs less to build and that because of its better proportions better designs may be used in its construction.

Those who cling to the detached house associate the group house with the "terraced" as it is called in the Middle West, a long row of stereotyped and monotonous houses. But it is rather a question of taste and intelligence on the part of the builder than that either one type of house or the other should be in the majority. Group houses may be varied. Detached houses may have the monotony of the "mill village."

It is not the intention of the government in the person of the housing administration to foist any pet scheme of housing upon the public. Certain standard types of houses for permanent construction, however, have been evolved by the Industrial Housing Bureau.

Nine types of houses are provided for: The single family house.

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